DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 373 EA 003 283

AUTHOR Winkelstein, Ellen
TITLE A Community-University Model for Urban Preschool Education.
PUB DATE 4 Feb 71
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (55th, New York, New York, February 4-7, 1971)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Community Control, Community Resources, *Early Childhood Education, *Experimental Schools, *Models, *Preschool Education, Urban Education

AESTRACT

An innovative model for community control of a preschool program joined community resources with university skills. Parents and students formed teaching teams for 39 children aged three to five. The community made ultimate program decisions; the community and the university together administered program decisions and planned curriculum; and the university provided a training program for students and parents. Data used to evaluate the model, compiled from parent interviews and students' written reports, indicate that the model's objective, to provide a means whereby an urban community can operate a preschool program, was achieved. (Author)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED047373

A COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY MODEL FOR URBAN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

by

Ellen Winkelstein
Boston University

OBJECTIVE

To design an innovative model for community control of a preschool program for three- to five-year-olds located in an urban public housing project, a model that joins community resources with university skills.

THE COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY MODEL

The issue of community control of educational programs and of the implementation of community educational values has been a major one in inner city public school systems in the last few years. Since our program was a preschool one, operating outside of the public school structure, it was possible to set up any model that could become operational.

The rationale for community control of our preschool program was twofold. From the community point of view, community control was necessary to ensure the implementation of community educational values. From the university point of view, a community controlled program was necessary in order to provide training in community education for parents and early childhood education students who would become urban community preschool program developers.

Paper presented on February 4, 1971 at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

EA 003 283

The community asked for university support in setting up the preschool. This support was provided by the university through its early childhood education students and faculty. The community responsibility for setting up the preschool fell to a group of parents who wanted a preschool for their children. The students taught with the parents in a parent-student team. This experience was part of the undergraduate and graduate students' program in early childhood education and was supervised by an early childhood faculty member, who also served as advisor to the preschool program.

The model was constructed so that the community was responsible for ultimate program decisions, the community and the university worked together on carrying out program decisions and on teaching and curriculum planning, and the university provided a training input that was necessary both for the functioning of this program and for the development of other community preschools by parents and students trained in this program.

Overall program decisions were made by the parents at parents' meetings with early childhood education students and faculty present to provide alternative possibilities for the parents to consider, thereby broadening the basis for decision making.

Curriculum planning was done by the parent-student team with faculty advice. Parents presented their ideas about education, information on their children's behavior, how they handled their children, and what the community was like. Students described the educational goals and procedures used to implement them of a variety of preschool programs. Goals were decided on that met the educational needs and values of the community as expressed by this particular group of preschool parents.

Various parental and university roles were set up to carry out the program's administrative, instructional and training functions. Since the staff of parents and students was largely part-time, it was decided that two full-time positions were

necessary, one for a mother to perform the administrative functions, and the other for an experienced student to coordinate instructional activities. These positions were basic to the necessary meshing of community and university resources and to the continuity and coordination of program activities. Another characteristic of the staff was that initially it was generally without training or experience in education, so that ongoing supervisory support by an early childhood faculty member was essential to constantly improve the quality of the administrative and instructional functioning of the program. A detailed description of the structure and function of the model's administrative, instructional and training vehicles follows.

The administrative functions were the responsibility of the parents and were carried out by the Parents' Council and the Program Administrator. These two parental administrative vehicles provided for community control of the program.

The Parents' Council was composed of every parent participating in the program. Its function was to make major program decisions at monthly meetings or whenever the need arose.

The position of Program Administrator was a full-time role filled by a mother with over one semester's experience in the program. She was elected by the Parents' Council according to the following criteria: length of time in the program, commitment to the program, ability to communicate with parents and the community, and ability to work with students and children. Her functions were to carry out the day-to-day administrative responsibilities, such as communicating with the parents about schedule changes, trips, parental teaching responsibilities, etc. The Program Administrator's most important responsibility was to be responsive to individual parent and community concerns and desires in relation to the preschool and to transmit these concerns to the Parents' Council and the instructional staff.

The instructional functions were the joint responsibility of the community and the university and were fulfilled by the Teaching Teams and the Instructional Director.

The Teaching Teams were composed of early childhood students who participated in the program two or four half days per week for one or two semesters, and mothers who participated one half day per week throughout the public school year and the two-month summer program. Each team met daily to plan for the future and to evaluate the day's activities. Teaching was considered to be a joint responsibility, but considerable freedom was given to individual team members to devise new instructional activities on their own.

The Instructional Director was selected by the Parents' Council from the group of early childhood graduate students with experience in community educational programs (including experience in this program). The Instructional Director's functions were to demonstrate activities with the children and give on-the-spot help and support to the Teaching Teams. She discussed instructional materials and activities with the Teams, and sought out materials, equipment and supplies for the preschool. She and the Program Administrator described the program to visitors and screened applicants to the program. They also discussed the program at educational meetings. As indicated above, the Instructional Director and the Program Administrator were the only two people in the program who were there every day, and they provided the necessary continuity and ongoing communication among parents and early childhood students.

The training functions were met by the University Early Childhood Education Program through the role of the Early Childhood Faculty Advisor. The Advisor had experience in parent-run cooperative preschools, the development and administration of preschool programs, curriculum development and teacher training. Her functions were to provide training for the early childhood students in curriculum development through an Early Childhood Curriculum Development Practicum. The students

could then use this curriculum development training as they planned the curriculum with the parents in the Teaching Team. She served as overall advisor to the program through attendance at Parents' Council meetings, informal discussions with the Instructional Director and Program Administrator during weekly visits to the preschool and supervision of funding activities. She also advised the Parents' Council on the selection of the Instructional Director.

The community-university model made it possible for the community to control an urban preschool program with university support by assigning final decision-making power to the community. In the functioning of the program, the community worked jointly with the university on implementing program decisions and on teaching and curriculum planning, and the university had responsibility for in-service training of parents and early childhood education students in every aspect of community preschool education, program development and implementation, teaching and curriculum planning.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The program began on a small scale with five parents and their children meeting in the participants' apartments. Each family held the program in their apartment one morning a week. Out of this physical involvement of the mothers as hosts to a program held in their own homes grew a feeling of personal responsibility for the education of their young children. During the second half of the year, the program doubled in size to include both a morning and an afternoon session and moved into a separate four-room apartment. The apartment was donated by the community from among the apartments set aside by the housing authority for community use. Mothers continued to teach in the program one morning or afternoon a week along with early childhood students. The program met during the public school year and for two months during the summer.

At the end of the first year, a proposal was written by the parents and early childhood students and faculty in order to obtain the funds necessary to operate the program the following year. The funding was to come through the community, not the university, so that the responsibility for running the program clearly fell to the community. The Community Development Council, with membership elected from the families living in the community, became the sponsor of the program.

The proposed size for the second year of the program was twenty children in the morning and twenty in the afternoon session. The program was able to expand during its second year after the housing authority made available the vacant apartment adjoining the preschool. The physical plant included a large area (made by breaking through the walls between the two living rooms and a bedroom), three smaller rooms (former bedrooms), a room with a large sink (former kitchen with stove and refrigerator removed), a kitchen and two bathrooms.

Funds to provide support for the second year of the program were received from a local private foundation for the salaries of the Program Administrator (a mother who had been in the program the year before) and the Instructional Director (an experienced graduate student who had been in the program since it began.) These full-time positions were top funding priorities in order to provide the administrative and educational continuity necessary for the program. Funds are still needed for equipment, supplies and curriculum materials, salaries for a full-time teacher (with experience in community educational programs), salaries for the mothers in the program teaching one half day per week, and the salary for a half-time evaluation and curriculum development staff member. During the spring of the second year of the program, funding activities, which had been carried on informally by a few parents and students and by the Program Administrator, the Instructional Director and the Faculty Advisor, became the responsibility of the parents' Funding Committee elected by the Parents' Council. The Funding Committee met regularly with the Faculty Advisor to plan a concerted funding effort.

DATA SOURCES FOR MODEL EVALUATION

Data from the parents and from the early childhood students in the 1969-70 program were used to evaluate the model. The administrative components were evaluated by data from the parents, the instructional components by data from the parents and the students and the training experience by data from the parents and the students. The data base, although not rigorous, is nevertheless revealing for the insights it gives into the functioning of the program.

The parental data consisted of interviews with a sample of nine of the twenty-five preschool mothers. Mothers were selected who varied in amount of involvement in the program as indicated by attendance at parents' meetings and on their teaching day. An interview schedule was administered twice to the same nine mothers. During the spring of the 1969-70 program, the mothers were interviewed at the preschool by an early childhood student teaching in the program, and in the fall of the 1970-71 program, the interviews were repeated in the mothers' homes, this time by two of the mothers in the program. The purpose of the second set of interviews was to elaborate upon the largely yes-no answers given during the first interviews.

The interview schedule was developed as part of the 1969-70 overall program evaluation to measure the mothers' attitudes toward the program. Specifically they were asked to react to their children's experience in the school, their own role in the school, the administrative and instructional structure of the school, the effect of their experience in this program on their relationship to the public schools, and whether their experience in this program would enable them to set up other similar programs. Although the interview schedule was intended for a broader purpose, many of the mothers' responses were applicable to the evaluation of the model.

The evaluative data received from the early childhood students was based on an initial and final written report by each of the fourteen students in the program. The initial reports were written after one month in the program and the

final reports at the end of four months for the students in the program for one semester and at the end of eight months for those in the program two semesters.

The student reports focussed on the training in community urban education gained from participation in the program. The following aspects of the experience were considered: the training in teaching and curriculum development, the training in program development and evaluation, and the effect of the experience on the future choice of the type of educational program they'd like to work in or develop themselves. Also, the student reports, along with the parent interviews, dealt with the instructional components of the model.

RESULTS

Program Statistics

Length of time program has been in operation

The program has been in continuous year-round existence for two years.

Number of participants in the program

Number of	Mid-year 1968-69	End of year 1968-69	Mid-year 1969-70	End of year 1969-70
Children	8	16	13	39
Families	5	9	9	25
Students	8	13	7	14

These statistics indicate that a viable and continuing program has been set up.

Administrative Components

Parents' Council

The decision of the parents to have each parent represented on this Council indicates the importance they attached to control of the program. More than half of the parents attended each Council meeting, despite the day-time scheduling of the meetings, which exluded some mothers.

The parent interview did not directly elicit reactions to the functioning of the Parents' Council, but several comments relate to the parents' decision-making role in the school. "The parents have to believe they're involved and it's their school and know what they say has an effect on what's done." "As a mother in a school, it's the first time I felt like I really had anything to say about what goes on."

Another indication that the Council was fulfilling its function is that the parents are making decisions about the future of the program. These plans for the future include adding a full-time teacher to the paid staff of Program Administrator and Instructional Director. Also, it is intended for the program to become a preschool curriculum development center.

These data show that the Parents' Council fulfilled its decision-making function.

Program Administrator

The Parents' Council was able to elect a Program Administrator by specifying a set of criteria for selection and agreeing on a mother who met these criteria. All nine mothers interviewed felt that it was important for a mother to fill this position and for the position to be full-time. One of the mothers expressed it in this way, "A mother should be there all the time because she knows more about the community, the children and their families."

The parent interview did not deal specifically with the Program Administrator's day-to-day administrative functions, but one mother commented that "parents know what's going on from the Program Administrator. Teachers may give a different viewpoint than a mother would."

The Program Administrator was seen as someone who was responsive to parent concerns. All the parents interviewed felt they could communicate with her and that "she is someone the mothers can identify with and talk freely to." The mothers pointed out her commitment to and "love" for the preschool.

Results from the parent interview indicate that the Program Administrator fulfilled her function as communicator with the parents and that parents felt only a community mother could perform this function.

Use of model in other programs

All nine mothers interviewed felt that the same model should be used to set up other programs in the community. "I think we need just this kind of program in this community." One mother's evaluation of the model was "it works out beautifully and gets the mothers involved. You can find mothers everywhere who really want to be involved in their child's preschool."

This result indicates that this way of operating a preschool was perceived by the parents as feasible.

Instructional Components

Teaching Teams

Students' attendance on their two or four half days per week was quite regular. The attendance of fourteen of the twenty-five mothers was erratic and unpredictable with periods of regular weekly attendance alternating with periods of irregular attendance. A core of eleven mothers was extremely reliable and not only attended on their own half day per week but also substituted for other mothers whenever the need arose.

The daily team meetings designed to plan the curriculum were not the focus of specific evaluation by either mothers or students. The teams did, however, get together at the end of each session and kept a log of the day's activities and the behavior of individual children. The daily log provided a record of the program that could be used for future planning and evaluation of instructional activities. Students reported that specific curriculum plans were discussed with the mothers, and one mother stated that the students were there "to find out what we want." All nine mothers felt they could talk freely with the students about curriculum planning.

The mothers' and students' joint responsibility for teaching was described in several different ways. The students liked the team approach of working with parents on a mutual project and sharing ideas and ways of doing things. All the mothers indicated in the interview that they could work with the students. One mother said, "They were very good teachers and worked very closely with the parents, and in fact that's why I want my son to go here."

Students indicated that working with parents fostered a general understanding of the community and its problems and of the children. A mother commented more specifically, "These teachers are right there and get to know the mothers, and it's almost like a personal type thing, and it has to be to get through to the child, to understand why he is the way he is."

The students felt that a basis for working together with the parents was established over the year through friendship and communication, and a mother described the relationship as "not mother-teacher, just friends."

Individual team members felt they had the option to try out any instructional activity. All the mothers interviewed said they were able to work with the children in whatever way they wanted. The students described an atmosphere of freedom to try out their own ideas.

Mothers and students described a special learning environment in which children and adults taught and learned in their own individual ways. All the mothers stated in the interview that their children had learned a great deal in school and "loved the school and all the activities." The students observed that children were natural, expressive and active.

The impression of the team members was that joint community-university responsibility for teaching and curriculum planning had been established.

Instructional Director

The Parents' Council unanimously chose one of the graduate students with experience in the program from its beginning as Director.

Students felt the Director was helpful to the Teaching Teams. All the mothers described the Director as supporting the Teaching Teams and the children. One mother said, "The Director gave the mothers a free hand and gave suggestions, which it should be because she doesn't live in this community and know what's best for the community."

The Director's function of providing ongoing communication with the students was evaluated by a mother, "It's good that the Director is there along with the Mother Administrator. The teachers can talk to the Director."

The Director functioned to support the work of the Teaching Teams and to provide communication, particularly for the students.

Training Components

Administrative Training

The mother interview revealed that seven of the nine mothers liked the administrative model and felt they could set up other similar programs. The remaining two mothers said they'd like to set up programs like this one, but it would be too difficult and too much of a responsibility.

Because of their experience in this program, the community looked to the preschool mothers for help in developing other programs and working with existing programs. Several mothers were given responsible positions in community organizations dealing with educational planning.

The mothers commented on their training in specific aspects of program administration. One mother said, "I know how to set up a program and do things in it and be in touch with the community." Several others commented on the relationship to be established with the community. "I'd try to get as many people from the community interested as possible." Several mothers felt the training in fund raising was essential for the development of other programs. One said, "I know how to write proposals and discuss a program with funding people."

One mother commented directly on the training input in this program and in others, "as long as we can find the type of professional help that we've found with this university, I think we could work out a great program."

The students felt they had gained the experience necessary for setting up their own school: organizing a school, getting money for it, and getting materials and equipment.

The administrative training gave students and parents confidence in their ability to become community preschool program developers.

Instructional Training

The parents were not asked to comment on the instructional training provided by the program, but they did feel they'd gained an understanding of teaching that would help them in communicating with the Public Schools. They were more convinced than before of the value of close communication between teachers and parents and that such communication was possible.

Several mothers became teacher aides in other educational programs in the community. Several other mothers decided they would like to become teachers. One mother said, "I can consider myself almost a professional now that I've worked in this program."

A few mothers commented on the training experience for the students. One mother said, "It helped these young teachers to understand a class better." Another said, "I don't think we should ever give up the early childhood students. They learn how to deal with children and their mothers and find out why it is a mother might be a little hard to handle when she comes into school."

Students said their work with the Faculty Advisor on curriculum development gave the necessary training experience for curriculum planning and implementation in the Teaching Teams with the day-to-day support of the Instructional Director.

Students became firmly committed to establishing good lines of communication with parents in any educational situation and to implementing community educational values. They liked

the team approach to teaching, particularly with parents involved, since it provided the benefit of feedback not present in a setting with one teacher for a class.

A result of the instructional training was that teaching as a cooperative process became an objective for parents and students.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper has been concerned with the administrative and instructional structure of an urban community preschool and not with its effect on the children's behavior. An evaluation of the attainment of the educational goals for the children is necessary, as well as further study of the training effects on parents and early childhood students, before conclusions can be drawn as to the educational significance of the model. If the results of these studies are positive, then it can be said that a successful innovative model for community control of an educational program has been developed, one that is directly responsive to community educational values. The model is practical and flexible, since many small, independently run community programs can be set up with different universities providing a variety of training inputs.

The model also provides a unique training experience in urban community education for parents and for future educators, both of whom will become program developers. These two groups can then work together to meet the need for community educational programs.